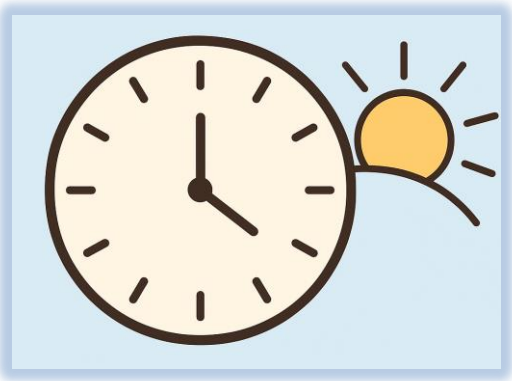
When the Clocks Fall Back: How Time Changes Affect Our Mood



Every fall, people across Canada and many other countries "fall back" by turning their clocks back one hour. It sounds simple—an extra hour of sleep!—but this small change can have a big impact on our minds and bodies.

The Reason for the Change
Daylight Saving Time (DST) was first introduced during World War I to save energy. The idea was to make better use of daylight by shifting the clock forward in the spring ("spring ahead") and back in the fall ("fall back"). While some people like the extra evening light in summer, many question whether the practice is still helpful today. In fact, several provinces have discussed getting rid of it altogether.

How Time Affects Our Brains
Our bodies run on an internal clock called the circadian rhythm. This 24-hour cycle tells us when to sleep, wake up, and feel hungry. The biggest signal for this rhythm is light. When it gets dark earlier after the clocks change, our brains produce more of a sleep hormone called melatonin. That can make us feel tired earlier in the evening.

For some people, less daylight can also lower levels of serotonin, a brain chemical linked to happiness. This can cause changes in mood, focus, and energy—especially in the darker months. That's one reason why November and December can feel harder for many people.

The Mental Health Connection
Studies show that time changes can affect mental health in several ways. Some people feel more anxious or down after the fall time change. Others notice trouble sleeping or concentrating. Students might find it harder to wake up in the morning or stay motivated during the day.

In northern countries like Canada, the shorter daylight hours can also contribute to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a type of depression that happens mostly in the winter. It's linked to a lack of sunlight, which can throw off our internal clocks even

more.

Simple Ways to Feel Better
Luckily, there are easy ways to help your body adjust:
- Get morning sunlight. Even 10–15 minutes helps reset your body clock.
- Stick to a routine. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Move your body. Exercise releases endorphins and boosts mood.
- Limit screens before bed. Blue light confuses your body's sense of time.
- Be patient. It can take a week or two for your body to fully adjust.

Time changes remind us how closely our mental health is connected to nature. Paying attention to your sleep, light exposure, and daily habits can make a big difference in how you feel when the clocks fall back.

Comprehension Questions

1.Why was Daylight Saving Time first created?
A. To help farmers wake up earlier
B. To save energy during wartime
C. To give people more free time
D. To make mornings darker

2. What does the body's circadian rhythm control?
A. Heart rate
B. Hunger and sleep patterns
C. Body temperature
D. Mood swings

3. What brain chemical is linked to happiness?
A. Melatonin
B. Cortisol
C. Serotonin
D. Adrenaline

4. Which symptom is often linked to less daylight?
A. Seasonal Affective Disorder
B. Insomnia
C. Heat exhaustion
D. Jet lag

5. What is one recommended way to adjust after the time change?
A. Stay up late to reset your clock
B. Use more screens at night
C. Get morning sunlight
D. Sleep all weekend

Short Answer Questions

1. What happens to our bodies when it gets dark earlier?

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2. How does the time change affect students' focus and energy?

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3.Why do some experts want to end Daylight Saving Time?

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4. What is one healthy habit you could try to feel better after the clocks change?

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5. How do light and sleep connect to our overall mental health?

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Writing Prompts

1. Describe how you feel when the clocks “fall back” or when winter begins. What helps you stay positive and energized?

2. Do you think we should keep changing the clocks twice a year, or stay on one time all year? Support your opinion with reasons.

Answer Key

Multiple Choice:

1. B 2. B 3. C 4. A 5. C

Short Answer (sample answers):

1. Our brains produce more melatonin, which makes us tired earlier.
2. The darker mornings and shorter days can make it harder to wake up and concentrate.
3. They believe the time changes cause stress and confusion and no longer save much energy.
4. Get sunlight in the morning, keep a regular schedule, or limit screen time before bed.
5. Light controls our circadian rhythm, which affects mood, energy, and sleep quality.

Sources

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)
Sleep Foundation
CBC News Health: "How time changes affect our brains"
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)